
Aspiranet

~ September 2024 ~

Monthly Training Topic

Birth Family Visits

For children in foster care, visits with their family are invaluable for maintaining their connections and relationships and help children to cope with being separated from their family.

Studies show that children in foster care who have regular, frequent contact with their family generally experience shorter stays in care, have more successful reunification, are less likely to re-enter foster care, and overall have improved emotional well being.

In your role as a resource parent, you have an important opportunity to help children to further develop and maintain their family connections. Family visits not only promote a child's family relationships and transition into care, but also reinforce their sense of community, family history and culture, which are important for a child's sense of identity, stability and well being.

Resource parents can also assist children to cope with a variety of feelings and reactions they may experience regarding their family. It's helpful to remember that it is normal for children to react to the grief and loss they experience in being separated from their family. And seeing their family can be stressful and confusing. As a result, you may see children struggle during the transitions before and after family visits with changes in behavior and mood. Resource parents can help by providing reassurance and emotional support to children in preparing for visits, and to allow children the opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings following visits.

It can be a natural response to want to protect children in your care from distressing reactions and perhaps come to the conclusion that the visits are too difficult and / or disruptive for a child. However, changes in a child's behavior before or after a family visit does not necessarily mean the visits are harmful to the child. As mentioned, the reactions are a normal response to the loss they feel. In fact, behavioral or emotional reactions can be due to their attachment with their parent and be the resulting upset in having to leave their parent again. Visits give children the opportunity to see that their birth families are okay and that their family members still love and care for them.

Visitation Plans

A child's visitation plan with their birth family is determined by court order and the County Social Worker, including if visits will be supervised. The child's County Social Worker communicates the visitation schedule and requirements to Aspiranet (and sometimes directly to resource parent). It is important for resource parents and Aspiranet Social Workers to communicate and collaborate regarding the visitation plan. It is typically required that children and youth participate in court ordered visitation, even if they don't want to go. If a child in your care indicates they do not want to attend family visits, inform your Aspiranet Social Worker who will notify the child's County Social Worker. Resource parents may not cancel or prevent a child from participating in visitation, as only the County Social Worker can make the determination to cancel or suspend visits. If a child is ill and unable to attend visitation, notify Aspiranet immediately so that visitation can be rescheduled or cancelled, if needed.

Resource Parent & Birth Parent Engagement

The child's County Social Worker will typically recommend the type of interaction resource parents have with birth parents. When determined appropriate, there are definite benefits to resource parent and birth parent interaction. With transportation to/from visits being a primary role of a resource parent, it can offer opportunities for briefly talking with the birth parent(s) before or after visits to help establish a relationship.

When initially meeting birth parents, it's helpful to ask parents about their children's schedules, food preferences, and other likes and dislikes. This not only assists with the child's transition but can provide help to establish a positive working relationship by valuing and respecting birth parents' knowledge of their child. You can also share with birth parents how the child is doing at home, in school, etc. to reassure parents and demonstrate respect for your mutual interest in the child's well being. It can be helpful as a resource parent to consider what you would want to know about your child, the concerns and reassurances you would be looking for if your child was in the care of other, unknown adults.

Sometimes, a child's parent may see a resource parent as a threat - viewing them as taking over as "the parent" to their child. You can assist by helping the birth parent understand that you are supplementing and supporting their role in the child's life, rather than replacing it. Some parents may try to regain control through criticizing how you dress or feed the child, complain to the social worker about you, or allege the child is being abused or neglected in your home. It can be very difficult not to take these things personally. Reach out to your Aspiranet Social Worker to "debrief" and share your own feelings and reactions. It may be helpful to also remember that the visits and separation are often difficult and painful for the child's family as well, and they also benefit from support and empathy.

Even if the relationship between the resource family and the birth family is less than ideal, there are still things resource families can do to try to establish and maintain a working relationship. One simple way is to be polite and professional whenever interacting with the birth parents. You can show through words and actions your willingness to collaborate and communicate with the birth parents.

Your attitude and interaction with a child's parent can have a positive impact for the child in your care. When the child can see positive engagement with their parent it brings a sense of reassurance and may help to reduce conflicted feelings around loyalty between their birth and resource families.

Aspiranet Support & Communication

Your Aspiranet Social Worker is available to you for support, consultation, and intervention regarding the children's reactions and behavior around family visits. It is important to communicate both positives and concerns related to a child's reactions and your observations during interaction with child's birth family. Please contact your Aspiranet Social Worker if your child seems especially distressed before or after visits and immediately report to Aspiranet any safety concerns regarding family visits.

Equally important is to communicate to Aspiranet information specific to the child's status **prior** to visitation that may need to be shared with the birth family and County before the visit. This includes if a child is not feeling well the day before or day of visitation, has had a rough day or week emotionally or behaviorally. Also very important to communicate is any injuries a child may have, including minor bumps, bruises and scrapes that children often get in their daily lives. Sharing this type of information with your Aspiranet Social Worker is vital as it allows for communication with the County Social Worker and birth parent ahead of visitation to reduce concerns and misunderstandings from occurring during visitation. Open communication can reduce the birth parent feeling "caught off guard" about their child's status, or only learning of it from the child at the visit. The goal is to help keep the lines of communication and relationships moving in a positive direction.

Aspiranet is here to support both you and the children in your care with visitation. Please do not hesitate to reach out for questions, concerns and support.

For information regarding Aspiranet procedures for Birth Family Visits, please see the Aspiranet Foster Parent Manual pages PRO 1 – 3.

Please sign and return this page to your Aspiranet Social Worker for training credit. My signature below indicates that I have completed the September 2024 "Birth Family Visitation" training.

Signature Resource Parent #1

Date

Print Name Resource Parent #1

Signature Resource Parent #2

Date

Print Name Resource Parent #2

Aspiranet Authorized Signature

Date

Training credit: ____ minutes